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ABSTRACT

The Pre-School Conference Program has four parts--selection, information gathering, August Conference, and follow-up. In the first phase, faculty, custodians, secretaries, administrators, and guidance counselors are surveyed to determine which students are frequent discipline problems. In the information-gathering phase, the student's previous record is checked in three areas--attendance, academic achievement, and attitudes. The third phase is a meeting in which an administrator, the student, and his parents discuss the student's record and outline a plan of action. The administrator has the parents and student sign a conference confirmation sheet that explains the areas discussed and the goals established and that notes there will be a follow-up. The student is also given an appointment with a counselor at which time he can go over his schedule for the upcoming year. The follow-up hinges on a survey of teachers after the first five weeks of the next term and a review of the student's grades at the end of the first grading period. If the student does not make progress, further conferences are scheduled. (Author/IRT)

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SYNOPSIS

PRE-SCHOOL CONFERENCE: A NEW APPROACH TO DISCIPLINE

In an attempt to help promote a positive outlook on the school front and establish rapport with the names of students who have had previous academic, attendance, or attitude problems, an August Conference Program was established. The rationale being that it offers a new beginning at the start of another school year. It, also, offers an opportunity for the student, parent, and administrator to hold a conference and to have a conversation to discuss up and coming situations opposed to the previous conference setting. Efforts are made to assure the student and parent that a realistic approach will be taken and every effort will be made to help the students to improve their previous records. The conference is a sincere effort and attempt from the school administrator to make the student and parent aware that the student's previous actions are developing into unacceptable behavior. It is mentioned that the school has, with the students in mind, established reasonable rules and regulations. It is brought out that only a few abuse these rules and by their own actions end-up in the office. It is mentioned that a student's attitude is often the cause for disciplinary action. If an individual has a positive attitude or at least an "I'll try" attitude, anything and everything attempted could be more acceptable.

In the final analysis, a student's action depends upon how an individual views his particular situation and the effort they are willing to put forth. The administrator is willing to give the benefit of the doubt and offer a helping hand. The parents are reminded that the administrator is as close as the telephone and only too ready to have another conference at anytime.

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PRE-SCHOOL CONFERENCE: A NEW APPROACH TO DISCIPLINE

The Problem

Each year across the nation thousands of secondary administrators are deluged with a myriad of student disciplinary problems. This takes much of the administrators time and patience. The real frustration deals with the repeaters; the frequent office visitors. These students are constantly in and out of the office. The frustration of these particular students is shared by their families, teachers, and the school administration. The reasons for this chronic misbehavior can stem from a low selfesteem, repeated failure, and constant hassle. These students often have frustrating home environments and the school offers additional frustration. The administrator then gets the blunt of it all. He presents an easy target for these students to attack.

How, then, does the administrator eliminate this target image and reduce the student's visits to his office? How can he control this particular situation? How can he modify these students' behavior? How can he enhance the educational setting for them, and consequently, the majority of the student body?

A Reasonable Solution

Over the years many attempts have been made to control those students who for one reason or another, cannot or will not comply with stated school rules and regulations. Usually the remedy has been to suspend. That has been the easiest and quickest way to eliminate the problem. However, recent court rulings have now stated that a student must be given "due process of the law", and records must be kept ot ensure that "due process" is followed.

In 1974, a Pre-School Conference Program was established at Hudson Senior High School. This was established before "due process" was an issue. An efficient method of keeping a student's disciplinary record was also formed that same year.

The Pre-School Conference Program is Hudson's way of dealing with the frequent office visitor. It offers a possible solution to the parents, and opens positive lines of communication from the school to the home. It offers an opportunity for parents to come to school before a crisis or a problem develops. It offers a chance for parents, students and the administrator to discuss the situation as it has been and to change old behavior patterns with new alternatives.

The Nuts and Bolts

The Pre-School Conference Program consists of four basic phases: the Selection, the Information Gathering, the August Conference, and the Follow-Up.

The Selection Phase

The Selection Phase uses a questionnaire which is sent to the faculty, custodians, secretaries, administrators, and the guidance counselors. These people are asked to list those students who have exhibited attendance, behavioral or academic problems. The list of names is then compiled to make one master list of those names that appear frequently. The administrators then review their disciplinary records and make the final decision as to which students will have the August Conferences.

The Information Gathering

The Information Gathering reviews the student's previous years' attendance, academic, and attitude records. This offers tangible proof of the student's need for a specialized approach to discipline.

The student can see the accumulative effect of one year's behavior and effort. This information can offer proof of those problems which the parents have undoubtedly been seeing for months. There is concrete evidence of what Mom and Dad have been saying all along.

CONFERENCE SETTING

When these parents have been contacted by the school, in the past, it has been for negative reasons. If there has been a conference, they have been under stress. During this conference, parents have an opportunity to discuss their studnets' particular situation with reason and calmness. Although the negative will be mentioned, and previous records discussed, the accent will be placed on the positive. This conference is to accentuate the positive and to offer realistic alternatives to past negative behavior. During this conference, discussion will center on developing recognizable and obtainable goals. These goals will be to improve the student's disciplinary record. It may center on one area or all of the three areas. It should be stressed that school has not started, and that this conference gives the parents and student time to review the past, and to discuss the new school year before it begins.

The administrator can suggest how these goals can be realized by referring to previous record. Attendance can easily by checked on a weekly homeroom basis. How many days can a student attend school? What does a student's attendance record tell a future employer? The administrator explains how an employee's absence can cause his employer to lose money, and that his employer is in business to make a profit. He can, also, indicate how attendance is viewed by others who equate it with reliability and dependability. It can, also, be affiliated with low grades.

The administrator must help the student realize that his previous records

are not acceptable or realistic. He must indicate to the parents and the student that the new school year will be one of adjustments and one of realism. The administrator can bring to the forefront the reason for the condition of the student's records; due primarily to a lack of effort on the part of the student. Most students have agreed with this point. They mention that they are not doing their best.

The administrator can establish other check points in any recognizable goal areas. Most schools are on nine week grading periods. This can offer a nineweek trail period by letting the student know that for nine weeks he can study and reap the harvest of his efforts by seeing the results in nine weeks. Nine weeks is a short term obtainable goal with measurable success resulting from effort in grades. Grades, also, offer a realistic argument for improvement and for motivating an increase in effort. What implication does a student's academic accume have on his admission to college? What indications do low grades give to future employers? Who established a student's academic record? When most students are asked these kinds of questions, they soon realize that they have cheated no one but themselves. The administrator, also, indicates that the "now" will effect the student's future. This usually has a sobering effect.

In concluding the conference, the administrator has the parents and student sign a conference confirmation sheet. This sheet explains what areas were discussed, the goals established and that there will be a follow-up to the August Conference. This sheet is important for future reference.

Before the parents and student leave, a guidance appointment is arranged. During this conference, the counselor checks the student's graduation requirements, academic accume, and the student's class schedule. It has been arranged that if the student's schedule is not realistic or that the student is unhappy

with his schedule of classes, they may change it at that time. This gives the student a chance for immediate change and removes an unpleasant schedule. It, also, introduces him to the guidance area, and opens other alternatives. The counselors have an important role in working with this student. They are notified in advance of those students who are coming in for August Conferences. Their advice and expertise is requested and adds another dimension to the Pre-School Conference.

FIVE WEEK FOLLOW-UP

Five weeks after school has started our follow-up program begins. A form is sent to all teachers of students who have had an August Conference. The form has three areas: Attitude - teachers are asked to rate the student's attitude - excellent, average or unsatisfactory, plus make comments; Class Attendance - list dates of absence or tardiness; Academic - circle letter grade on form, add comments on how student has been helped or can improve academic standing.

Once this information is returned, it offers a quick sketch as to how the student is adjusting. If the feedback is positive, it can offer immediate praise. If the information is negative, it calls for a helping hand and a pep talk. In any event, all teacher feedback is discussed with the student. If needed, a student, teacher conference is scheduled to investigate alternatives for improvement. A phone call and a progress report is made. All information is explained, and the necessary action is taken.

9 WEEK GRADING PERIOD

Hudson High School has four nine week grading periods. After the first nine weeks of school, a report card is sent home. This card shows a nine week attendance and tardy record as well as grades earned. This gives an easy nine

week progress report. This is phase three of our follow-up. A copy is kept on file in the administrator's office along with the student disciplinary record. The student has a conference, and the report card and disciplinary card are discussed. If specific problems exist, these are discussed. If necessary, a parent-teacher conference may be scheduled.

A key work needs to be emphasized. That word is patience. Change in the specific area or areas will take time. It may not occur. It has been our good fortune to have the positive out weigh the negative.

In the case of no improvement or progress, an immediate parent conference is scheduled and specific measures are laid out. Alternatives can be to infrom the juvenile authorities, professional agencies, or the issuing of a work permit.

STUDENT CONTACT

During the second nine week grading period, the students are on their own. The semester or second nine week grading card, is a good indication of what patterns have been changed. This shows the student's academic effort as well as their attendance pattern during an unmonitored period. Each student will need different handling and words of encouragement.

SUMMARY

We have been using the Pre-School Conference technique since the 1974-75 school year. In 1975-76, we established the conference program at our Junior High School. We have had success. The main thrust of the programis to build confidence with the students and their families, and to build confidence in the school's administrators and the counselors as a supporting agent to those who have school related problems.

Also, to communicate to those people that they need positive avenues of

communication, to share a common concern - their student. Most of the parents who are contacted are frustrated and appreciate the help. The problems are then shared, discussed, and attempts are made to alleviate these anxieties.

One recent commercial sums it up, "you can pay me now or you can pay me later". The idea that an ounce of prevention can save many pounds of cure later, can mean that much frustration will be eliminated. It works for us. It may work for you. Try it, you might like it.